

# Mitigating Weapons and Violence in Schools

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## Objectives:

- a. Identify four key facts about school gun violence.
- b. Discuss effective school and community partnerships to reduce weapons and violence in schools.
- c. Describe effective prevention policies to curb school violence.



Key facts about school gun violence:

Lessons learned from incidents of gun violence in schools is integral to creating a comprehensive plan to address their threat and effects. Studies organizations provides critical lessons that need to guide school safety.

Gun violence in American schools has a disproportionate impact on students of color

Those discharging guns on school grounds most likely have a connection to the school

Guns normally come from home, family, or friends

There are nearly always warning signs

## Superintendent Resigns After Third Grader Found His Gun in School Bathroom

Robby Stuteville, superintendent of the Rising Star Independent School District in Texas, left his gun in an elementary school bathroom, where it was discovered by a student.



LINCOLN, Neb. (KOLN) - Lincoln Police are currently investigating how a fifth grade Prescott Elementary School student got access to a loaded handgun after an officer found it in their backpack at school Friday. Lincoln Public Schools superintendent Dr. Paul Gausman said a student approached a Prescott Elementary staff member around noon and reported another student had shown them a gun and made "concerning comments about violence" toward them.

Gausman said staff immediately took the backpack to the school's office and called police, who found a loaded handgun inside. "These professionals continue to build positive relationships and that's really what kept us safe today," Gausman said. "It was brave of that student to come forward and tell their teacher what they had seen."

Gausman said when police arrived, both the students and their parents were interviewed by officers. Gausman said at this time, he couldn't comment on how the child got their hands on the gun or what their motives were because the investigation is ongoing. He did say the student who brought the gun will face legal consequences. Gausman said because the situation was handled within minutes, they didn't have to use any of their Standard Response Protocols, meaning the school day wasn't disrupted, though there was a police presence throughout the afternoon.

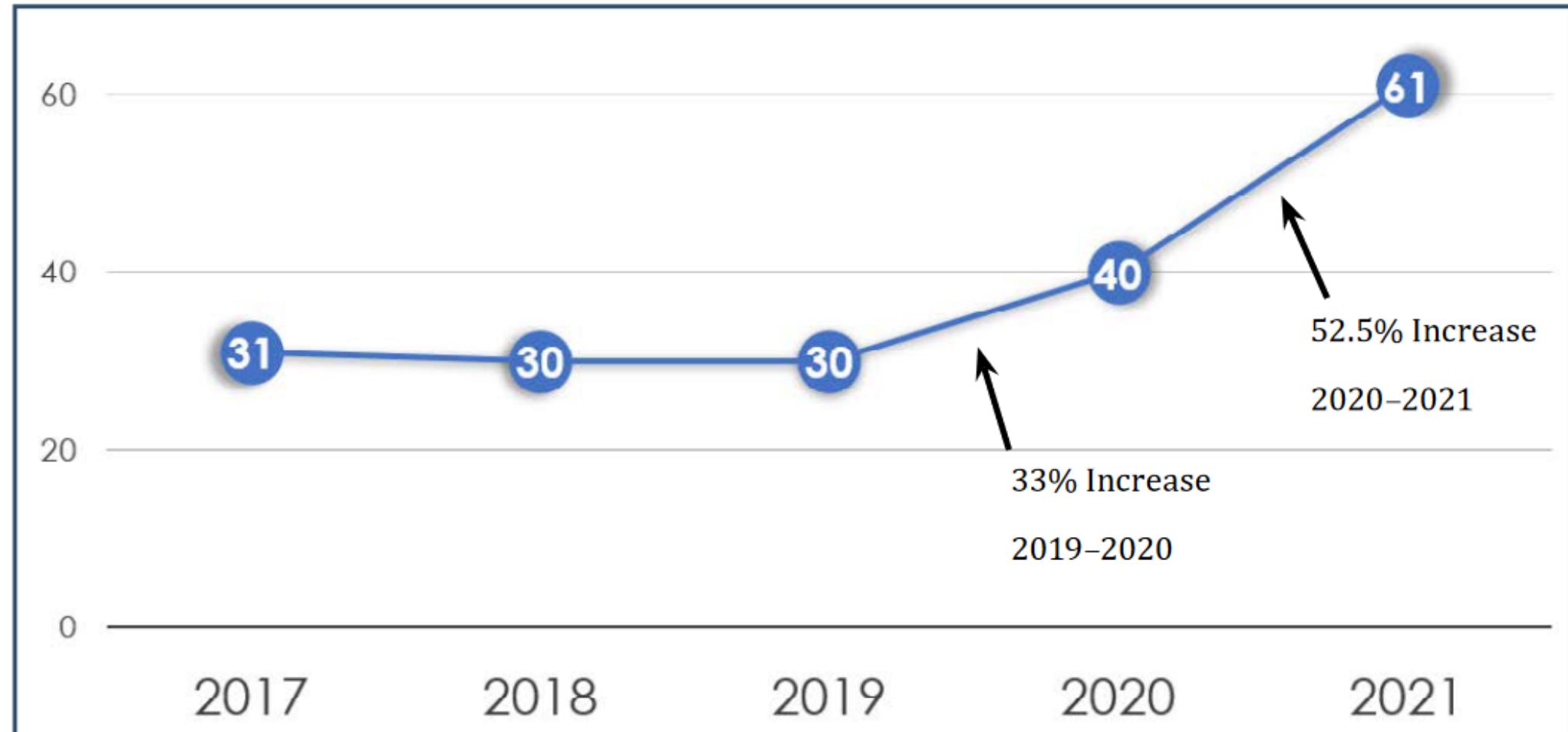
"I was really pleased as I walked into the building to see that every police officer who was there had a responsibility and they were engaging in that responsibility. And they responded exactly as we would want them to do," Gausman said. He said the staff are trained to handle these situations and they did exactly as they were trained to do with "poise and calm."



# Incident Statistics

## Active Shooter Incidents 2017–2021

U.S. Department of Justice  
Federal Bureau of Investigation



# Stressors

TABLE 1: STRESSORS

Stressors	Number	%
Mental health	39	62
Financial strain	31	49
Job related	22	35
Conflicts with friends/peers	18	29
Marital problems	17	27
Abuse of illicit drugs/alcohol	14	22
Other (e.g. caregiving responsibilities)	14	22
Conflict at school	14	22
Physical injury	13	21
Conflict with parents	11	18
Conflict with other family members	10	16
Sexual stress/frustration	8	13
Criminal problems	7	11
Civil problems	6	10
Death of friend/relative	4	6
None	1	2

# Concerning Behaviors

- Every attacker (100%) exhibited concerning behaviors **prior to their attack**, displayed at school. 77 had concerning behaviors at home or in the community, and 74% displayed them online
- Concerning behaviors ranged from relatively minor activities to actions that elicited fear in those who observed them.
  - Made out of character statements
  - Displayed other minor changes in behavior
  - Made direct threats of violence or brought weapons to school
  - In most of the cases behavior elicited concern from bystanders

These behaviors provide opportunities for school staff, law enforcement, families, and friends to recognize students who are in crisis and intervene as appropriate.

## Common Themes of Concerning Behaviors

*Threats to the target or others, and/or intent to attack*

*Intense or escalating anger*

*Interest in weapons*

*Sadness, depression, or isolation*

*Changes in behavior or appearance*

*Suicide and/or self-harm*

*Interest in violence*

*Talk of being bullied*

*Concerns over grades/attendance*

*Harassing others*

# Warning Signs

- When it comes to school shootings, there are nearly always advance indications
  - These warning signs, if appropriately identified, can offer an opportunity for intervention.
  - 100% of the perpetrators showed concerning behaviors and 77% of the time at least one person, most often a peer, knew about their plan (Secret Service)
- These data suggest that fostering a trusting and emotionally safe school climate— where students are willing to both ask adults for help and to report any destructive thoughts and behaviors, such as gun threats on social media or weapons carrying—can be effective tools for prevention.
- **Taking immediate action on those warning signs is essential.**



# Effective School and Community Partnerships

Effective school and community partnerships reduce weapons and violence in schools

- Nearly 40 years of incidents.
- 73% of school shooters acquired their firearm from the home of a parent or close relative (73%, 76%)
- From 2008 to 2017, nearly half of the shootings, the firearm was easily accessible or was not stored securely



The US Secret Service

# Effective School and Community Partnerships

School districts can help prevent school shootings by issuing notices to families about the critical importance of secure firearm storage in keeping schools and students safe.

Supportive and trusting school environments are the strongest way to prevent school violence. The locus of school violence prevention must necessarily center around schools.

Creating safe schools to support them to become “community schools”—the focal point and heart of their communities. It is recommended that schools utilize district, state, and federal funding to help schools partner with community members particularly in communities that experience high rates of gun violence.

Community schools work with local partners to provide needed services that help uplift the entire community - becoming centers of education but fulfill a broader purpose of contributing to stable, healthy, and safe neighborhoods.

In schools facing high levels of violence in and outside of the school building, a community school might fund programs such as creating safe passages ([safe passages](#)) to and from school, granting alternatives to out-of-school suspensions that offer meaningful educational opportunities for students, providing family counseling, increasing access to mentoring both in and outside of school, and incorporating restorative justice into discipline policies.

# Best protective strategy is **PREVENTION**

A national poll of SROs concluded that **20% of schools are not prepared for an active shooter incident**



**Assess school climate regularly**

Promote Inclusiveness and empowerment



**Eliminate punitive discipline practices**  
(zero tolerance)

Creates racial disparities, false positives, or resentment



**Students thrive in positive school environments.**

- Supportive schools foster an affirming academic climate while also maintaining secure physical settings.
- Safe schools are built on trusting relationships among students, staff, and administrators.

# Prevention Success Stories

**Chesterfield County, SC (October, 2018)**  
Two separate incidents in which student made verbal or social media threats while on school campuses were immediately **reported by other students** that had seen and/or overheard the threats to shoot up the schools.



**Rural Nebraska (October 2020).** Parents of a high school sophomore contacted the 2-county school district superintendent and averted a plan that included 4 students at 2 schools "to be even better than Columbine"

**Bartow, FL (October 2018):**  
A mother called in after receiving an automated call from the school reporting that her daughter was not in second period class. The girl, and another girl were found in the bathroom plotting to stab other students and drink their blood. After which they planned to kill themselves.

# EFFECTIVE PREVENTION POLICIES TO CURB SCHOOL VIOLENCE

1

**Prevention:** Establish a three-tiered community prevention model

- Pre-event;
- Threat Assessment Standardized Protocol
- Monitoring

2

**Pre-event:** Tip lines and other reporting mechanisms

3

**Threat Assessments:** Establish multi-disciplinary threat assessment teams

4

**Monitor:** Continue to observe escalating behaviors and implement countermeasures



# Questions

**What strategies are currently in your school district to prevent violence?**

**What is the attitude of the community in becoming a partner in preventing school violence?**

**What policies would make your environment safer?**



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